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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1389  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4184  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1996  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1861  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2432  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0868  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2796  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001092

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S GAY UNDERGROUND: HIDDEN, GROWING  
AND AT RISK

REF: ASHGABAT 380

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY. Officially nonexistent and a taboo topic, Turkmenistan's gay population is finding partners with greater frequency. Men will first meet in public places and then clandestinely continue seeing each other, although the shame and social stigma attached to being gay leads to frequent self denial. Some see gay sex as subversive resistance to a strict, traditional society. Gay men who are forced to marry either neglect their wives or resign themselves to the circumstances. While the government does not report any HIV-positive cases, gay men and their families are especially at risk for sexually transmitted illnesses (STI) due to lack of information and support. This problem will only worsen without reliable data and a focused educational campaign. END SUMMARY.

A TABOO SUBCULTURE

13. (SBU) If government officials are to be believed, there are no gays in Turkmenistan. State media categorically avoids the topic. Even the Russian word for gay, "goluboi", remains taboo for polite conversation. Yet a gay subculture does exist in Turkmenistan. Although it is impossible to determine the number of gay men in the country, locals report that they are finding partners with greater frequency and that numbers of gay men seeking partners is increasing.

FROM PUBLIC MEETINGS...

14. (SBU) Gays commonly meet one another for the first time in public places in broad daylight. A man who has been with three different partners met them at Russian Bazaar, Amir Bazaar and on the bus. There are no set gestures or signals for indicating interest, so men have to be extremely careful. One wrong choice could permanently ostracize them from their family and community. Typically, when two men meet in a public place and display interest toward each other, they will exchange contact information and agree to take a walk together. This is relatively safe as the walk gives both of

them a chance to gauge the inclination of the other.

...TO CLANDESTINE TRYSTS

¶5. (SBU) If interest is unambiguously reciprocated, the two men will then agree to meet in private. They will take great pains to ensure their friends and families don't find out. Two good friends only discovered each other's sexual preferences when it was revealed they had both slept with the same man. Some nightclubs are also reported to shelter gay activity. In particular, the discotheque within the "Nissa" hotel is known for having gay clientele and even male prostitutes.

BUT THEY'RE "NOT GAY"

¶6. (SBU) Turkmen will almost never admit to being "goluboi". The closest answer one could hear is "I don't like women." Turkmen frequently feel a sense of shame about the matter and psychologically distinguish between their "normal" and their clandestine lives. Some consider having sex with men as the only way to escape from what they feel is an overly repressive, stifling environment. For these select few, gay sex represents a form of subversive resistance to strict, family-oriented cultural mores.

GAY MARRIAGE? NOT EXACTLY...

¶7. (SBU) Cultural pressures demand that many Turkmen marry young. For gay men, this is a particular source of anxiety. One man described the misery of leaving his Ashgabat lover to

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return to his home in Turkmenbashi in order to get married. These men have no support network that they can turn to and must confront this problem in isolation. Some choose to continue surreptitiously finding partners on the side, remaining emotionally distant from their wives. Others try to resign themselves to living a married life as best they can.

AT RISK FOR HIV/AIDS

¶8. (SBU) The government reported zero official HIV cases in the past several years, although an unofficial 2007 UNDP report estimated 1,000 HIV-positive cases in Turkmenistan (reftel). Clinics and health officials are regularly told not to document patients that come in for treatment or testing of the virus. There are very few public awareness initiatives available to educate people on STI prevention and treatment. Most Turkmen believe HIV can only be transmitted through vaginal sex. Unprotected sex puts not only the men at risk but also their wives and children, who will not be aware of the danger of transmission and will not receive treatment.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT. Gays in Turkmenistan will continue to be a taboo subject in the foreseeable future. With no local support network or access to internet forums, this group will remain an underground subculture in Turkmenistan. Besides the emotional trauma from stigmatization that gay men endure, they are a growing health risk from STIs. They have little opportunity to be informed about safety precautions and hesitate to seek medical attention. If the government continues ignoring the problem of HIV/AIDS and fails to provide available information on safety and precaution, this problem will only worsen. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN